

Background

Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) policy and outreach efforts focus on identifying, tracking, and pursuing legislative, policy, and state and federal planning opportunities of value and importance to the Sierra Nevada Region. Its work is geared towards educating and influencing legislators and other key-decision makers about the importance of the Region to the health and well-being of the state to ensure appropriate investment and policy for the Sierra Nevada Region.

Current Status

On May 10, Governor Jerry Brown issued [Executive Order B-52-18](#) (EO) to combat tree mortality, increase the ability of Sierra Nevada forests to capture and store carbon, and to improve forest management. In addition to recognizing the critical values and services that forests provide to all Californians, the EO identifies a variety of proactive forest management and supporting market and training activities necessary to address the critical state of forests to make them resilient to a changing climate.

Key elements of the order include:

- Improving forest management and restoration including doubling active management using fuels thinning, controlled fires, and reforestation from 250,000 acres to 500,000 acres on state and private lands; and expanding grants, training, and other incentives to improve forest health.
- Providing regulatory relief by streamlining permitting for projects that improve forest health and reduce fuels on private property.
- Reducing barriers for prescribed fire including launching new training and certification programs to help promote forest health through prescribed burning.
- Boosting education and outreach to landowners about the most effective ways to reduce fuel sources on private lands.
- Supporting wood products innovation and use of forest products by the building industry.

In addition, the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) released the [Forest Carbon Plan](#) as part of the Administration's forest health initiative. SNC staff contributed substantially to this plan, which generally recommends actions consistent with SNC efforts and specifically calls out the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) as an implementation model.

The Governor also announced the formation of a Forest Management Task Force, which will be convened in the coming weeks to help oversee and implement the Executive Order and the Forest Carbon Plan.

Bonds:

California voters will be asked to approve \$13 billion in two separate water bonds this year.

- Proposition 68, the California Clean Water and Safe Parks Act (Park Bond), is a \$4.1 billion measure set for the June 5 ballot. If approved by voters, the SNC is

poised to receive \$55 million from this Proposition: \$30 million in direct funding to support SNC programs, generally, and \$25 million from a forest health allocation. The Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) is also set to receive \$60M in funding for use in the Sierra Nevada and Cascade region. A verbal update on the results of the election will be provided at the Board meeting.

- The Water Supply and Water Quality Act (Meral Water Bond) is an \$8.9 billion measure. On April 25, the California Secretary of State announced that sufficient signatures have been submitted to place the water bond on the ballot in November. If voters approve this initiative the SNC will receive \$250 million in funding of which \$200 million will be available to support activities consistent with the WIP and the other \$50 million for projects that reduce the threat of wildfires.

Legislation:

In addition to the Governor's EO, 2017 fire season impacts on major urban population centers have resulted in unprecedented legislative attention on wildfire and associated issues. Staff is working with the proponents of the following two bills that would have a direct impact on the Sierra Nevada Conservancy:

- AB 2849 (Stone, Monterey/Santa Clara/Santa Cruz): Sierra Nevada Conservancy: watershed improvement: tribal organization.
This bill is intended to make additions and clarifications to SNC's enabling statute by establishing the WIP; expanding the SNC "Tribal Organization" eligible grant applicant definition to match the tribal definition used in Prop 1 which uses the federally recognized Native American Heritage Commission list; and readdressing the Legislative Liaison bill that Assembly Member Brian Dahle sponsored in 2015 such that Legislative Liaisons include two members of Senate and Assembly, each: with one appointee from each house from a district within SNC boundary, and one appointee from each house from a district outside the SNC boundary. (SNC staff is working closely with the bill's author and sponsor, the Sierra Business Council, on the legislation.)
- SB 1015 (Allen, Los Angeles): California Climate Resiliency Program.
This bill would require the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to develop and implement the California Climate Resiliency Program to increase resiliency to climate change impacts in urban and rural communities, natural systems, natural and working lands, and developed areas. This bill would create a new source of implementation/grant funding for the SNC. To be eligible to receive moneys from the fund, "participating conservancies" must adopt a climate resiliency program consistent with a variety of objectives and priorities, including but not limited to improving forest and watershed health (Staff is working with CNRA and other state conservancies on this legislation).

Staff is tracking the following legislation that could have an impact on the programs and activities of the SNC and, where appropriate, providing information to proponents and partners:

Prescribed Fire and Forest Health

- SB 1260 (Jackson, District 19, Santa Barbara): Fire prevention and protection: prescribed burns.
This bill includes a number of provisions to support increased use of prescribed burns, including: requiring the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection's "Vegetation Treatment Program Programmatic EIR" as the environmental document for prescribed burns; agreement that Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) burning-operation agreements constitute prima facie evidence of due diligence should a prescribed fire escape; requiring the State Fire Marshal to develop a curriculum to train firefighters as certified fire bosses; and requiring CAL FIRE to establish a grant program for public education and safety regarding community wildfire protection and prevention activities.
- AB 2120 (Quirk, Alameda): Wildfires.
This bill would require the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to report annually the air pollutant emissions following an unplanned wildfire that has burned 10,000 acres or more and for that report to be posted on the CARB website for public access. The Report would include, among other things, comparison of emissions generated by wildfire to likely emissions from a prescribed burn in the same area.
- AB 2551 (Wood, Del Norte/Humboldt/Mendocino): Forest and Wildland Health Improvement and Fire Prevention Program: joint prescribed burning operations.
This bill would require CAL FIRE to establish and administer a Forest and Wildland Health Improvement and Fire Prevention Program to promote forest and wildland health, restoration, resilience, and fire prevention and preparedness. Some activities include identifying funding sources; improving prescribed burn policies and training opportunities; and establishing an interagency working group consisting of conservation organizations, CARB, local Air Quality Management Districts, and others to analyze barriers to prescribed burning.
- AB 2672 (Patterson, Fresno/Tulare): California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006: wildfires.
This bill would require the CARB, in consultation with CAL FIRE, to submit an annual report estimating the annual emissions of Greenhouse Gases (GHG) for wildfires in California that have burned 10,000 acres or more and comparing those emissions to the amount of GHG offset by CARB's GHG regulatory programs. Report will also include the amount of money from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) going to vegetation management and fire reduction activities.

Forest Products and Mass Timber

- AB 2518 (Aguilar-Curry, Colusa/Lake/Napa/Sonoma): Innovative forest products and mass timber.
This bill would require CAL FIRE and State Board of Forestry and others to explore markets of mass timber, including milling, development, and expansion of innovative forest products.
- AB 2842 (Bigelow, Alpine/Amador/Placer/etc.): Wood Products.
This bill would require that CAL FIRE develop a California Wood Innovations Small

Grants Program to provide grants and loans to projects that expand use of wood products and increase in-state wood processing. The bill would also give \$20 million from GGRF to GO-Biz in the Governor's Office to provide grants and loans to projects that utilize sawmills to process wood products from vegetation management projects.

WIP recognition

The Governor's forest health initiative described earlier in the report provided significant recognition of the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program. The WIP is called out in the Forest Carbon Plan as an early implementation opportunity and funding proposed in the May Revise is specifically identified to support implementation of the WIP. In early April, the Legislative Analyst Office released a report entitled: [Improving California's Forest and Watershed Management](#). The report highlights the importance of healthy forests, identifies shortcomings in the state's management approach, and recommends actions the Legislature might take to address forest and watershed health. The report recognizes the WIP as a model of collaboration for addressing forest health issues, adding to the recognition of the WIP in the Little Hoover Commission's report. The report also references the results of the Mokelumne Avoided Cost Analysis to support proactive forest management.

Statewide policy activities

The SNC staff has contributed to the development of a Natural and Working Lands Implementation Plan (Plan) by the California Natural Resources Agency, as described in the AB 32 Scoping Plan. A [Concept Paper](#) that outlines the scope and process for developing the Plan was released in mid-May and will be followed by a public comment process with the goal of completing the plan by November of this year. Staff is currently working with the technical assistance team advising Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in development of a natural and working lands carbon model (CALAND) to quantify carbon stocks on natural lands throughout the state now and into the future under climate change. The model compares different management activities to determine how they might affect carbon sequestration and emission from forests, fields, and wetlands.

The SNC is a member of the Technical Advisory Committee, which is tasked with vetting model parameters and other input data to improve the accuracy of the modeling effort. SNC's role includes identifying and sharing relevant new research, assessing baseline data (e.g., acres burned, average high-severity fire rates, growth rates in untreated/unhealthy forests), and connecting lead researchers with scientists researching problems which need answers (e.g., where are forests not re-growing after high severity fire).

The CNRA may release a public version of CALAND in late Summer or early Fall 2018.

[CalEnviroScreen](#) is a mapping tool created by California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) that is designed to aggregate environmental, social, economic, and health data for communities across California with the goal of assessing and identifying the most vulnerable Disadvantaged Communities (DAC) in the state.

Unfortunately, criteria included in the current version, doesn't identify DACs in the Sierra Nevada - most DACs are in the Central Valley or Los Angeles area.

The OEHHA staff has started planning for version 4.0 of the model and SNC staff was invited to participate in an informal meeting to discuss wildfire-related concerns that may be relevant to the development of the next version. Staff identified potential additions for OEHHA consideration including air quality/health concerns from wildfire smoke plumes, fire danger and community risk in unhealthy forests (especially in the southern Sierra), and economic/social impacts on communities impacted by megafires – including rebuilding, property values, and a reduction of tourism/recreation funding streams.

The next version of the CalEnviroScreen tool could be released in 2019.

National Disaster Resilience Competition (NDRC)

The SNC staff is moving into project implementation for the Forest and Watershed Health Program (FWHP). At the time of this writing, the U.S. Forest Service is preparing to release solicitations to award approximately \$8 million in contracts for biomass removal and fuel reduction, reforestation site preparation, rangeland infrastructure improvements, and noxious weed abatement activities across over 5,700 acres within the Rim Fire footprint. Staff are also working closely with the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to award a contract to prepare environmental review documents for NDRC's 1,995-acre fuel break system in Tuolumne County. The Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), a partner on the NDRC project, has secured initial approval from more than half of the landowners involved in the fuel break project.

The Beck Group, the consultant hired by HCD and managed by SNC staff, has begun work on the Biomass Utilization Facility (BUF) phase 1 feedstock and feasibility assessment. In April, SNC and the Beck Group hosted a public kick off meeting to inform stakeholders of the study process and solicit feedback on the study. Initial study results are expected in summer of 2018. SNC staff are actively pursuing partnerships to assist in developing the facility in phase 2 of the BUF project.

The SNC staff is also pleased to report the launch of the new [SNC NDRC webpage](#).

Next Steps

Staff will continue to track and report on legislative bills with an eye for anything that could be relevant to the SNC on a material basis or which could affect the SNC or its communities/partners from a planning, policy, and/or regulatory perspective; and will continue to identify and engage in state planning activities with implications for Region.

Recommendation

This is an informational item only; no formal action is needed by the Board at this time, although Boardmembers are encouraged to share their thoughts and comments.